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ABSTRACT

In examining how one state (Illincis) approaches the development of a comprehensive state capacity for program improvement in vocational education, it is helpful to review federal legislative action. Research and development (R & D) did not become an official legislative element of vocational education until the 1963 Vocational Education Act was enacted. Its major provisions supported research in vocational education and established the Research Coordinating Units (RCUs). The major provisions of the 1968 Amendments to the 1963 Act changed the face of the RCUs and redirected the efforts of many states. Prior to the passage of the Educational Amendments of 1976 a two-year study conducted by the National Academy of Science Committee on Vocational Education Research and Development (COVERD) examined the total spectrum of vocational education R & D. The messages presented by COVERD should be addressed in any effort to develop a state-level comprehensive plan. The past legislative changes have moved vocational education R & D from basic to applied research and the RCUs from universities to state departments. Most RCUs may ultimately become an integral part of the total vocational education system at the state level. (The author explains how Illinois is implementing various legislative provisions. His answers to sixteen questions from the audience of vocational education research and development personnel are appended.) (EM)

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Occasional Paper No. 34

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE STATE CAPACITY FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

by

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The National Center for Research in Vocational Education
The Ohio State University
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PREFACE

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education is pleased to have Dr. Ronald D. McCage share with us his thoughts with respect to developing a comprehensive state capacity for program improvement. Dr. McCage's topic is based not only on his beliefs and conceptualizations of the area but on demonstrated performance in terms of effectively articulating the various subelements of the R & D enterprise toward program improvement in vocational education.

Dr. McCage was born in Highland Park, Michigan. He graduated from high school in New Concord, Kentucky, and received a B.S. in Industrial Arts at Murray State University in 1961. In 1966, he received a master's degree in Education from Southern Illinois University. Then in 1970 he received his Ed.D. in Industrial Education at Texas A & M University. Dr. McCage's professional experience includes positions such as an industrial arts teacher, vocational coordinator, and Coordinator of RCU. His present position is Director, Research and Development Section, Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education, Illinois Office of Education.

Those of you who have been following the development of the vocational education legislation and the evolution of the R & D elements of that legislation know that there has been a great deal of interest and attention in trying to effect a more articulated and coordinated effort across the various subelements such as research, development, demonstration, curriculum development, and leadership development. One of our concerns here at the National Center as well as in state divisions of vocational education is how can we get it all together.

On behalf of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education and the Ohio State University, I take pleasure in presenting Dr. Ron McCage and his lecture, "The Development of a Comprehensive State Capacity for Program Improvement."

Robert E. Taylor
Executive Director
The National Center for Research
in Vocational Education

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE STATE CAPACITY FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

I would assume that most of you present today are probably connected with the National Center or at least have an interest in the research and development field, which some of us often refer to as the R & D game. I would like to try to develop in some depth the manner in which Illinois approaches "The Development of a Comprehensive State Capacity for Program Improvement." In making this speech I would like to set the record straight. I have received a lot of credit for what has been established in Illinois, but in reality I have only been instrumental in carrying out what some other people—namely Robert Gray and William Reynolds—conceived and were already heavily involved in when I arrived there in 1970. They have had a lot to do with what I am going to talk about and should receive a certain amount of credit for its original initiative.

To get into it, I'd like to develop some legislative background in brief form and then lead up to what we are faced with right now and try to describe the manner in which we operate. Some of the things that I will be talking about are still in a state of motion because we have just undergone an agency reorganization. Part of that reorganization will be pointed out in more detail during the remarks that I will make later. We hope the reorganization will enhance the efforts that Illinois has already made to try to consolidate the areas that Bob Taylor mentioned in his introduction.

I would like to start by asking you a question. As I said earlier, most of you are in some way involved with the research, development, and diffusion process. Have you ever stopped to ask how you got involved in this field or better yet why you got involved in it to start with. Have you ever thought about your personal involvement as being part of a much larger research, development, and diffusion process, even to the extent that it is part of a major national effort to carry out the intent of legislation? No matter how large or small our job may be, in the process, we are all working toward the same general goal, whether we realize it or not.

Personally, I never thought much about this concept until I joined the Illinois Research Coordinating Unit (RCU) seven years ago. To give you a little personal background, I grew up in Calloway County, Kentucky; went to a very small rural high school; attended Murray State, which at that time was basically a teacher preparation institution; spent two years teaching at Calloway County, which is in the same town; spent two years in Germany with Uncle Sam; spent about one year working in an adult vocational center in Cairo, Illinois; and then did master's work at Southern Illinois University and Texas A & M. I didn't make these points to present my life background but to simply make the point that during all that time and experience and all of my formal education that I supposedly had, I emerged without any of that experience impacting upon me, i.e., the importance of legislative background and how it really influences the things that we do. I think this is especially true in a state agency operation such as I am in, in Illinois. I say with no reservation, that in 1970 when I joined the Research Coordinating Unit in Illinois I didn't even know what an RCU was. I went through the History and Philosophy of Vocational Education and all of those other great courses we were exposed to in graduate school, and I came out having no idea of what an RCU was or what it was supposed to be. In the last seven years I have tried to learn what an RCU is from the ground up. One of the things that really hit me about three years ago was the influence, significance, and impact federal legislation has on these kinds of things that we do and the methods and techniques we use to carry them out. I think many of you here at The Center can relate to this extremely well.

If you think about legislative history pertaining to vocational education research, which in my opinion is still in its infancy, you normally tend to include: Part C, research under the former bill; Part D, exemplary; and Part I, curriculum. You should remember that until 1963 most of the research relating to vocational education that was conducted was either in the form of unfunded dissertations or faculty initiated studies. There was very little that was done beyond that. Historically, research and development did not become an official legislative element of vocational education until the 1963 Vocational Education Act was enacted into law. One of the major provisions of the '63 Act under Section 4(c) was to provide funds for the Commissioner to support research in vocational education and to provide for the establishment of the Research Coordinating Units in each of the states and trust territories. Of course, at that time, the RCUs started very much as the curriculum management centers are being operated now. They were a direct grant operation and during the period of 1963-69 they were continued along on the basis of reapplication, resubmission, and being awarded a continuation grant. Illinois got involved in that process and was one of the first twenty-four states to receive a grant. The Illinois RCU began its operation in August of 1965. Like all of the other states, from 1965 through 1969, it operated on a continuing grant basis. When the RCU started in Illinois, the kinds of things that were done fell into the broad categories of assessments and evaluations or leaned heavily toward basic or pure kinds of research activities as contracted to the applied or developmental emphasis of today. Toward the end of the initial period a trend began to develop toward conducting applied or programmatic research.

In 1968 when Congress enacted the Amendments to the 1963 Act there were about three major provisions which changed the face of the RCU and had the ultimate effect of redirecting the effort of those in many of the states. In reviewing the legislation prior to 1968, in terms of the evaluation that was done, one of the high spots was the RCU. As a result, Congress made research a permanent part of vocational education under Part C, which basically provided for an equal share of the funds to go to the states as well as to the U.S. Commissioner of Education. Funds that went to the states could be used basically for two things: (1) to pay administrative costs of operating a state RCU up to 75 percent of the cost; and (2) to conduct research activities through grants or contracts, or internally if the state chose to operate that way.

One of the key things this provision did under Part C was, for the first time it gave funds to the state, and inherent within this is that it had the effect of bringing the RCU under the control of the state director. I don't know whether you are familiar with the pattern of the RCUs or not, but prior to that time roughly 60 percent of the RCUs were in universities rather than in state departments. I won't argue the merits of university based vs. state department based RCUs, but the point I wish to make is that when the state director got control of the funds a gradual trend of the RCUs moving away from the university to the state department began to develop. As of August, 1977, there are only about seven—or about 15 percent of the RCUs that remain in the universities. Those that are located in state departments seem to be of three basic configurations. Thirty-six are in the state departments in the department of adult vocational-technical education, or whatever it is called within a given state; nine are under a bureau of research type set-up within the state department, indirectly connected with the state director of vocational education; and then there are four small states, in terms of amount of funds received, in which the state director and the RCU director are one and the same. Since there is an RCU in each state and trust territory, these figures should total fifty-six. Part C had the effect of putting the money in the state department and the ultimate effect of causing most of the RCUs to move into the state department. This trend is ongoing today.

The second major activity of Congress was to add Part D for exemplary programs. These funds were made available to facilitate local-level implementation and demonstration. Basically, what we did in Illinois was to demonstrate several of the tested products that we had developed under our

own Part C activities. That was our first effort toward tying Part C and Part D together. We began to use Part C for research and development and Part D for the demonstration and diffusion to allow people to look at the concept in the setting in which it was developed.

The third major activity was the addition of Part I for curriculum. If you are familiar with the old bill, you know that both Part C and D were state and federal shared programs whereas Part I was only federal and was used primarily for two purposes: (1) to fund curriculum development activities that centered on national priorities and (2) later, to support the National Curriculum Management Center Network, which now has six centers scattered throughout the country, one of which is the East Central Curriculum Management Center which is now located in our Research and Development Section.

The key point here is that most of the money used was federal. Consequently, if states wanted to get involved in curriculum development they basically had to rely upon other sources which usually meant using Part B, which was the general distribution funds, or Part C, which was research. I don't think a lot of people realize it but even the new legislation language defines Section 131, which is research, exactly the same as under Part C except for one half of a paragraph which deals with using the funds for support of local disseminators. Additionally, Part C strongly inferred curriculum development and authorized its support under Part C. Most states only read sub-point one. They ignored the curriculum provision and went strictly along the research line, but it has been an element of Part C legislation since 1968. Anyway, if a state wanted to get involved at that time in curriculum development, funds came primarily from either Parts B or C. Most of the personnel development, of course, came either from Parts B or C or from EPDA. The Illinois Division of Vocational and Technical Education at the time of *implementing* the 1968 Amendments, felt strongly enough about curriculum development and personnel development that it created a special section called the Professional Curriculum Development Unit and allocated a substantial sum of money for those purposes. At that time and through 1976 the Research and Development Section in our department consisted basically of the research and exemplary, with those two tied together. Then in a separate section we located the curriculum development and professional development, but there was a direct tie between the two units so that things developed in research could become the basis for a curriculum or inservice activity. The operational process that I am going to describe later was used by both sections, so we had the coordination started very early that was necessary to tie all of these elements together.

Most of you probably know that as we got ready to look toward passing a new vocational education act—it really started in 1973 and was accomplished in 1976—in anticipation of writing this bill, a major two-year study was initiated by USOE to examine the total spectrum of vocational education research and development. Your director, Dr. Robert Taylor, was a member of the committee that conducted this study, and Dr. Rupert Evans of the University of Illinois was the chairperson.

I don't think it is any secret that I am referring to the National Academy of Science Committee on Vocational Education Research and Development. The COVERD study, as it became known, defined research as including Part C, both the federal and state shares; Part D, both federal and state; and the Part I, federal funds for curriculum development. Any reference or finding made in COVERD includes all of these elements.

Vocational education research came under a considerable amount of fire as a result of this study. Many of us have become defensive about it and have tried to rationalize, and to make excuses for the alleged weak showing. But, while the COVERD report itself may have been criticized for some of its own inherent weaknesses, an objective review by most people will reveal that its findings and conclusions were on target. COVERD presents at least four messages that should be received and

addressed in any effort to develop a state-level comprehensive plan for program improvement. I'd like to briefly present those points for your consideration.

COVERD basically told us that most vocational education research and development had been conducted in total isolation, each element from the other, with very little coordination in and among the parts in research, exemplary, and curriculum development. COVERD recommended that these elements be consolidated and that all of the activities conducted, follow a continuum that would run from research through development through dissemination, diffusion, and so forth. COVERD further inferred that the elements be coordinated through a systematic or comprehensive plan for management at both the state and the federal levels. This first indictment, so to speak, by the COVERD report is very serious in terms of what a state agency was really charged to do in vocational education research and development, under the 1968 Amendments. If you really study the intent of the 1968 Amendments, you see that the real intent was to concentrate primarily in the applied and programmatic realm. It is clear that the intent of the legislation even at that point was toward the applied, especially at the state level.

The second point in dealing with COVERD was that some of the members felt that there was probably adequate visible evidence to support the contention that the research and development activities had had an impact, but there was almost a total lack of real documented evidence that any impact had occurred. Consequently, I think the basic message is that in planning the future and really developing in the system, we must take into consideration that product and process evaluation was practically nonexistent. In other words, when we went to testify before COVERD, we took several reports and described several activities that we felt had had impact, but when they would ask us to show our impact, we had no hard data to support our contention. So, I think COVERD was accurate when they stated that some $250 million had been extended without documented results. This one finding had impact on the legislation to the extent that at least under research and the curriculum items, we have to assure that this impact will be evident at the application stage.

COVERD also said that vocational research and development had not been based on valid or long-range priorities. I think that was probably more true at the federal level than at the state level. I know that in Illinois we have operated on a priority system for roughly four years, but generally speaking, the statement is true.

COVERD also found that many different types of activities had been conducted under the guise, vocational education research and development. We did everything ranging from the design, implementation, and operation of sophisticated management information systems and evaluation systems to the conduct of single classroom activities. We covered the waterfront and rarely concentrated on anything. I think that ties back to the priority. I think we have to also acknowledge that some $71 million of that $250 million went directly into getting the career education movement underway. It is hard to justify using these funds in that manner, and it is also hard to document its use in a COVERD type study. But I think it has to be recognized that roughly one-fourth of the funds went to the career education effort as opposed to the vocational education effort.

Inasmuch as the COVERD report was not released until after the first versions of the Pell and Perkins Bill were introduced to amend the Vocational Education Act, it is not totally clear as to whether the COVERD report actually influenced the legislative process or not. No one will admit or deny that it did. In a way it really doesn't matter but a thorough review of the bill, the COVERD report, Subpart 3 for Program Improvement and Supportive Services, which lays out a specification for use of the funds received at the state level and also that which applies to national level, reveals that at least 80 to 90 percent of the COVERD recommendations are being almost directly translated into legislation.

I know that these are things you may have already been familiar with, but I think that they are pertinent to what we are talking about here today because they show some of the progression that has taken place in the thirteen-year process of getting where we are now in terms of the legislation. I think when the RCUs were initially funded, they were meant to be heavy in basic or pure research. We have seen a trend from that to where there is no question that what we do under vocational education research or program improvement under the new legislation has to be applied and programmatic. Not only that, but as I will show in a minute, it has to be applied in the classroom level. We've seen the trend where many of the RCUs started out in the university setting and have now moved into state departments. I could go one step further. As a result of the Educational Amendments of 1976 all of them will eventually be in state departments. I think that most of them will ultimately be in the department of vocational education or whatever it is called within a given state rather than under bureau set-up. It has happened in Pennsylvania, which was under a bureau set-up; and some of the other states are moving in that direction as we sit here today. I think that what I am really saying is that, more and more you are seeing the research coordinating unit being given expanded responsibilities and becoming an integral part of the total vocational education system at the state level. I think the trend is definitely there and that there is ample evidence to support it.

I think then that Illinois, and I speak about the state I am familiar with, does conceptually represent the intent of the legislation. The Research and Development/Professional and Curriculum Development Sections and their functions and the operational processes with minor changes have been combined for the management of program improvement activities. I believe this approach could become a model for what COVERD is inferring and what Subpart 3 of Public Law 94-482 is mandating in vocational education.

The vocational education title of the Educational Amendments of 1976 under the Subpart 3 specifies that 80 percent of the funds that go to the state be used for support of the Basic Grant Program to support the regular student based programs in the local school. The remaining 20 percent is to go to the program improvement function under Subpart 3 which includes six things: research, exemplary and innovative programs, curriculum development, guidance and counseling, personnel development, and grants for elimination of sex bias. This is a departure from the 1968 Amendments where the appropriation under Part C research was divided equally between the U.S. Commissioner and the states. Now the state's share is placed directly in the bill, and the allocation goes to the states as a part of its annual allocation. Further, a minimum of 20 percent of the 20 percent for program improvement, must be used for vocational guidance and counseling which leaves the balance for the other five things that were mentioned.

Another point I would like to make is that contrary to popular belief and the way most people interpret the legislation, the Act does not actually mandate an RCU at the state level. What the Act actually says is that if you want to conduct program improvement, which is defined specifically as research, curriculum development, and exemplary, then you will coordinate these activities through the RCUs. Theoretically, a state could exclude these areas and not have a research, curriculum, or exemplary program, and not have to have an RCU. If you conduct those kinds of activities then you must have one, and it is mandated that the RCU be the management element for these activities. The reason I point this out is that this has been a major point of contention between some of the state directors and some of the RCU directors.

In Illinois, prior to August of this year, we've made the case, then, where research and exemplary were administered by research and development with curriculum and personnel under a separate section. Since the Act calls for the consolidation of research, exemplary, and curriculum, under the RCU we have undergone a major reorganization in which anything that is related to

vocational education research, exemplary, curriculum development, and personnel development, and the grants for sex bias is now part of the Research and Development Section. We now have all of these functions consolidated in one place. This gives us the capability then to further implement the idea that Bob mentioned and that I will expand upon a little more shortly in relation to the continuum approach.

In addition to all of those elements, the Central Curriculum Management Center is also assigned to the Research and Development Section which makes it possible for us to tie the dissemination mandates of the legislation under Subpart 3 directly to the Curriculum Management Center Network and have all dissemination and diffusion coordination under one management. In addition, we operate three to four federal grants and contracts out of this section at any one time.

The second point is that the new bill requires that all activities be based on sound priorities and that research and curriculum be conducted through a contract managed by the RCU or conducted internally by the RCU. For the past seven years Illinois has conducted program improvement activities through a request for proposal process. We have used the contract as a vehicle for accomplishing the activities that were our state priorities.

Consequently we already had in place the capability to meet the contract mandate in the new legislation, so it doesn't affect us very much in that area.

In 1972 we initiated a process for the development of research and development priorities. What we do in terms of identifying our priorities is roughly as follows. In about October of each year we begin the process by distributing about 2,000 copies of an abbreviated survey to all of our clientele in the field. Instead of having a long sophisticated instrument (which we tried earlier), we basically asked a very simple question. What activities should the state agencies be involved in to really help improve vocational education? We used to try to say, what type of research activities, what type of curriculum, and so forth. But we found that we were asking the question from a legislative perspective rather than from an intent perspective. In other words we look at research as being what we can fund under research or what curriculum we can fund under curriculum from a state management point of view rather than whether it really is research and/or curriculum development. Now we simply ask, what can we do to help you? What kind of developmental activities, inservice, and so forth, do you need? Then we make the determination as to where the resources are taken from. We found that the very simple direct question approach, both in written form and in the form of input conferences, and so forth, gave us the kind of information that tended to point out two major things.

First, it simply points out the trends and needs that people are feeling at the local level at that point in time. Admittedly, we got of lot of those in this type of a survey. We get people who say "Fund my Title I project," "Fund my special education project," or whatever it might be. But when you separate those things out, anywhere from six to fifteen things will surface that are really important to people at the local level at that time. Ironically, they will change each year, which is an interesting phenomenon.

Another interesting point is that the types of things we identify through this process appear as the USOE priorities for Part C and D activities about a year and a half later. We say very often that from a statistical or sophisticated research point of view, the process won't hold up. But we think that by going to the local people and getting their input we really find out what the needs are, and we can try to respond to those needs. In this respect we have preceded national trends by anywhere from one to three years with our annual priorities.

Marla Peterson, of the Center, was working on a career education project in Illinois. There were two other ongoing projects—Larry Bailey's Career Development for Children Project and the ABLE project at Northern. It may not be a sophisticated approach, but at least it identifies the needs and trends.

Briefly, then, as we get this information in, we begin to massage the data into a master list of potential activities. The master list is reviewed by agency staff until the things that are the most pressing tend to surface. These items are then matched to the amount of dollars we have available, and these become the priorities for that given year. We then move from this stage into writing of requests for proposals. The RFPs that we generate are very open-ended. They basically say that we have a job we want to have done, and this is what it is about. We give the people the option of telling us how it should be done and how the amount of dollars that we have allocated for that activity can best be used to get that job done. We think this has also been very successful. In selecting the recipients we don't like to use the word "bid" because we don't take the lowest bidder—we take the one that tends to give us the most "bang for the bucks," so to speak, in terms of what is being asked for. Then we issue the RFPs similar to any other agency. We get them back and run them through a review process which selects the so-called winner, and we award the contract very similarly to what anyone else would do.

If you're familiar with some of the processes at the federal level, especially the Bureau of Occupational and Adult Education, used for monitoring, you know that they are regulatory. We take the attitude of working directly with and being a service to the people that we fund with, rather than being strictly regulatory. At least, that's the attitude my section operates on. In other words, we don't just give someone a contract and say, come back in a year and show us what you've done. If you have problems, we work right along with you. I think that attitude has helped with a lot of the success that we have experienced.

I would also like to stress that while this imaginary cycle of developing the priorities, the RFPs, and so forth, is going on, we also have eighty-five funding activities running simultaneously which total about $3.25 million under the new bill. So remember that the staff that is doing the planning, the writing, and so forth, for the priorities, are also monitoring roughly ten to fifteen activities each at the same time. That's why I hesitate to use the word "cycle," because it's really not appropriate. We've got simultaneous cycles going on.

The third major point is that the Act mandates that all of your activities under research, exemplary curriculum, and so forth, be done by the RCU. I've already made the point that we've consolidated about six functions under one section. The point I'd like to get into which wraps up my formal comments is that in conducting these activities we like to think that we have a program improvement model which starts with the initial phases of what we could basically try to define as research, moves from the base of research through a developmental process, moves from the developmental process into a phase of dissemination and diffusion, and ends ultimately with the idea that the innovation is adopted and implemented on a large scale at the local level.

Basically, then, research, development, and diffusion activities for all program improvement activities in Illinois operate or will continue to operate along the same conceptual basis that we have used for about four years. This conceptual idea starts out with the ultimate plan of ending up with something that is implementable and useable at the local level. In this program improvement or continuum we've already mentioned the priority development. Once the priorities are funded, they can enter this model at different stages which depends upon what the activity might entail. Not everything we do follows this model, but at least, theoretically, we try to approach an activity

from this point of view. Initially, we try to feel that we have a research and planning phase, and under the new bill I think you could look at that as being supportable under Section 131, research, or 133, curriculum development. This is where we really document the need. I might say that back in the priority development process we do consult with some of the areas in AIM/ARM and the curriculum management center and make sure that things are not already done. But we make the assumption that something needs to be done or at least identify it as a need. Then we try to do all the necessary literature reviews, assessments of the state-of-the-art, and initial planning on which something can be developed and later disseminated. We then move into the developmental and field testing phase if it happens to be a curriculum project or an instructional materials project. Also, in many of our inservice and preservice programs we put emphasis on actually developing the program before we conduct it, so it might also fall in this phase. From the beginning, we look toward the end and say, given this product, how is the best way to disseminate it or make sure that it's implemented in the field. We have a number of vehicles that most of us are familiar with. None of this is really new, and I'm not trying to sell it as anything that's new. All I'm trying to say is that when we get involved in something we try to look at it from the start to finish. If we're looking at a basic workshop, a demonstration center, or integration into a university preservice—what program is the best vehicle for dissemination? We try to look toward that end and make sure that it happens in the process. All through this process, we try to build in, and we will try to build in much more heavily in the future the element of evaluation and accountability. Section 131, research, and under 133, curriculum, basically say that the applicant must demonstrate that what you're proposing has a reasonable probability of impacting in a substantial number of classrooms within five years of the termination of the contract. If you're going to play that game, which is really "going toward the product end," I think that you've got to infer that research and development in vocational education at the state level in the future is going to be heavily geared toward curriculum and instructional materials. If you're going to adhere to the act, and be accountable, then that's what the bill says. Inherent in this assumption are two things which are paramont as far as we are concerned.

One is emphasis on evaluation and accountability all the way through the process, and two is emphasis on diffusion and dissemination. If you don't have the data to show the concept is valid, then you really can't promote it as something that should be implemented. If you don't look at diffusion and dissemination, you can spend time and money on evaluation and accountability, and then still fall flat on your face. I'm not trying to sell this as an approach or anything that's unique. It's just that we try to look at the whole process, and break it into phases. I use the term "phases" rather than "years." Phases may coincide with years, but not necessarily.

Finally, the new bill requires that each state RCU develop a Comprehensive Plan for Program Improvement. Our plan, at this point is more of a concept paper than an actual plan. The plan that the RCU has to submit must include how to fund or to utilize, the states' priorities for program improvement, and the structure of the RCU. The comprehensive plan must be a part of the state plan. In addition to these minimum requirements, we must submit two copies of an abstract of each project to the Commissioner and to the National Center for Research in Vocational Education within fifteen days of the starting date of the contract and then two copies of the final report or final product resulting from the project within three months after termination. The state may use the funds under the new bill to support the administrative cost of the RCU. The RCU may accomplish its activities internally with its own staff.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: Have you had any kind of formal linkages with the clientele or clientele groups that you fund with?

We only have one linkage that I would call formal. About six years ago, Bill Reynolds started what we now call the University Occupational Liaison Council. We have eight universities in Illinois that offer or award some type of degree in vocational or occupational education. We write a contract with each of these institutions, and they meet and work together as a formal group. They are our link between the office and the universities. For instance, if a contract comes from a university it goes through that campus liaison person. Any of our mailing is supposed to go that way also. Any of our initial contact with a given university is supposed to go through the council. The University Liaison Council also has some other responsibilities in terms of advising the department concerning the entire spectrum of occupational education, personnel development, and so forth.

That's the only thing I could really call a formal link. I think it would be very difficult to do in the entire state since we have 1,052 school districts (750 that submit one and five-year plans for vocational education), 39 community college districts, and eight universities which also deal in occupational education.

Question: How are you organized to handle the "guidance and counseling" area?

We have a section within the department called the Special Programs Section. It has three full-time staff that work with the local schools as consultants in the area of career development and occupational information. What we intend to do with that money is to set up a network of nineteen career guidance centers. Career guidance was under another section before the reorganization. I think without our organizational structure that is the best place for it to be.

I have one comment, too, in regard to the grants for sex bias. I'd like to make a distinction between those and the $50,000 minimum that has to be used for administration purposes for the elimination of sex bias. The Sex Equity Administrator is under the State Director. The RCU deals only with the grant aspect. The reason for this is that the bill says those activities that are directed toward sex bias elimination grants should either be research, curriculum development, personnel development, or exemplary activities.

Question: Do you agree with some form of direct state input for the USOE priorities? How can we get these priorities when we need them?

I agree the states should have some part in helping USOE to determine what those priorities are. I have been on a review committee that has done this with USOE. Basically a group sits around the table and decides on the priorities from a list. I think there needs to be a whole formal process linked with the center, USOE, and the states in helping to identify priorities. I think we would be willing to do our part in whatever that process would be.

Question: You indicated that for your unit and for other RCUs around the country the program improvement dollars would be invested in very practical ways that would hopefully assure the short-range five-year impact specified in the legislation. But where will the basic research be done?

I really don't have an answer. It is so complex. It really comes down to the fact that Congress has almost "legislated away" our real ability, through at least the state-level dollars, to conduct basic research, unless you can tie that in to that development process.

I think we can still conduct basic research through the state money or through the federal money, provided that we can build off it. That's one possibility. NIE started out the way the rest of us did. I think you can go right back to what I said about the RCUs. The RCUs started out with the same intent. NIE started out with the intent of doing basic research. They got in trouble with the Congress for a number of reasons, but one is that Congress is a very practical body and it asks for results. Results are something they can visibly see and something that kids use in the classroom. So NIE in a sense was politically forced toward the applied. We've been forced toward the applied. You have some capability of doing that within your center but we really have no real source other than what we can generate or tie in to the bigger picture from a legal point of view. I don't really know.

I didn't carry that point far enough a while ago. But as I mentioned earlier, in the past, as in my section, we've had the management information system; we've developed evaluation systems; we've conducted evaluations; and we've done assessments. We can no longer legally do those under the research dollars unless we can build on those in some way toward the end product. In fact, the information system, the evaluation and assessment, have essentially been in a sense "legislated away" from the research function. If you really analyze the bill, it points you toward the end product. It doesn't say that everything you do is curriculum or instructional materials. But when you deal with the impact end, you've got to almost move in that direction. You do have some capabilities under exemplary and some capabilities under personnel that give you quite a bit of flexibility. I don't want to overlook that, but I don't really have an answer.